

Climate Science Center RFP Webinar FAQ

These FAQ and other items related to the CSC hosting awards process can be found at <https://nccwsc.usgs.gov/csc-recompetition>

Q: What should institutions do if they are primarily interested in a consortium role?

Q: How can non-profit organizations respond to this proposal?

A: Interested parties should network with other institutions to see who is planning to propose as a host institution. All consortium partners should have a clearly identified role and function in a consortium.

Q: Is this a research proposal?

A: No, this is funding hosting the Climate Science Center. Specific research activities will be funded by separate agreements.

Q: Is matching funding required?

Q: Are in-kind contributions required?

A: No. In the past, universities have provided “matching funds” in various ways, including reduced indirect cost rates, return of indirect cost funds to the CSC, funding of associated faculty lines, and the like, but this is not a requirement. In-kind contributions can, however, affect the long-term capabilities of the center and will be considered as available resources during the review process.

Q: What do you mean but “support” in regard to the data steward section of the RFP?

A: Data stewards help with data management through the life cycle of projects. Support is referred to here as funding to support that position. Funding of a data steward by the host institution is not a requirement. Climate Science Centers in the past have requested ownership of this function, but it is fully optional. If funding is not included in a proposal for data steward support, NCCWSC will provide those services directly.

Q: How should we provide an example of co-production?

A: An acceptable example of co-production would demonstrate that your team has experience with co-produced activities and has the knowledge necessary for facilitating this type of work.

Q: What is the appropriate format for the required CV?

A: The Program Announcement (“RFP”) has been revised to address CV format and content. The revised language is included at the end of this FAQ.

Q: How should we include conflicts of interest?

A: The Program Announcement (“RFP”) has been revised to address information needed to identify potential conflicts. The revised language is included at the end of this FAQ.

Q: Are budget tables and justification included in the 15 page limit?

A: No.

Q: Are evaluation criteria assigned weights?

A: The Program Announcement has been revised to address the weighting of scoring criteria. The revised language is included at the end of this FAQ.

Q: How should the language in the RFP concerning guiding the CSC research portfolio be interpreted? What relationship is envisioned between consortium leaders, Stakeholder Advisory Committees, and USGS CSC leaders?

A: We envision a close and collaborative partnership between the university director, USGS director, and ESAC on the strategic needs and directions for the CSC science program. The university director should

1. Be familiar with the full suite of activities underway within the Host Institution, consortium partners, and other CSC-funded investigators (e.g., USGS).
2. Play a leadership role in the strategic planning and implementation of this portfolio, in conjunction with the CSC Director and the Stakeholder Advisory Committee.
3. Encourage and facilitate the engagement of faculty and staff from across the institution (and CSC consortium, where appropriate) to increase awareness of, and where possible, increase contribution to, the goals of the CSC.
4. Facilitate the development of the CSC as a known and desired research and training partner across the involved institution(s).
5. Serve as an advocate for CSC needs with Host Institution management, including:
 - a. Timely and efficient award, subaward, and contract management
 - b. Timely and efficient implementation of agreement commitments (e.g., for space, personnel, reporting, etc.)
 - c. Management of university-paid staff (e.g., office assignments, computer availability and support, with the understanding that some research staff might be more directly involved in USGS-directed projects)

Q: What will happen with partners who are now in the Northeast region and will not be going forward?

A: Until the Midwest CSC is funded and established, the Northeast CSC will continue unchanged. NCCWSC has encouraged the NE CSC team to continue its research planning and to implement good projects that make sense for the region. If those projects extend past the transition to a Midwest CSC, they will be completed as planned, even if collaborators are no longer in the Northeast region. No research relationships or projects will be terminated. Current Northeast CSC partners with interest in the MW region should feel free to apply as host or partners, without any effect on their existing NE activities, unless those activities would duplicate activities funded under a new MW CSC award.

Q: What are the expectations for the role of consortium partners?

A: We would like to see a specific role for each consortium partner in proposals. Specific expertise or experience should be considered when explaining the proposed role of the consortium partner. The reason why each proposed partner was chosen should be clear to us.

Q: Can you expand on the tribal engagement section of the proposal (specifically, the BIA Climate Science Tribal Liaison)?

A: The BIA requested proposals from tribal organizations for Climate Science Tribal Liaisons (5 total for all CSCs) based on a model for the position that was created at the South Central Climate Science Center. The role of the Climate Science Tribal Liaison is to facilitate communications between the Climate Science Center and tribes in order to increase successful co-development of science with the tribes. While employed by tribal organizations, functionally, the Tribal Liaisons will operate as staff members of the CSC (are located in CSC office, attend staff meetings, etc.). Approximately 10% of their work will be to try to bring tribes together in their region by joining and facilitating working groups, information sessions, etc. to bring together comprehensive plans and partnerships.

Q: Can we propose an alternative to the BIA Climate Science Tribal Liaison position to accomplish this?

A: Yes.

Q: Who will be in the group of reviewers for the RFP?

A: A group of federal employees from DOI bureaus, NOAA and USDA. We will charge them with making a balanced decision that provides the best value to the government.

Q: Are universities or organizations that are not named in the consortium eligible for funding?

A: Yes. Funding from the host agreement / award can be transferred to support host functions at other institutions.

Q: Who makes funding decisions?

A: There are two types of funding decisions. This Program Announcement and proposal process will determine the Host institutions for the four CSC regions. These proposals will be evaluated by a Federal panel (see previous answer) and an award made by USGS to a single Host Institution. The selected Host Institution may provide funding to partner institutions from this award to support hosting activities in accordance with its proposal and the final award terms. Host Institutions are also eligible for research funding provided non-competitively. Decisions on these funds are made by the USGS CSC Director, in response to proposals or as part of co-development. Research awards are provided to the Host Institution, which may provide subawards to consortium partners and other parties

Q: If USGS must approve all university proposals, why have I seen RFPs from host centers in the past?

A: Some host institutions use “mini-RFPs” to solicit ideas and proposals from within their consortium network, as part of development of responses to USGS-identified priorities and funding availability. All proposals for research funding are submitted by the Host Institution and funding for research is provided by award to the Host Institution, which may then subaward to others.

Q: Should we provide an expected funding request for one year or five years?

A: 5 years, with each year’s funding subject to the availability of funds and adequate progress on implementing the terms of the award.

Q: Can a federal lab apply to be a host institution?

A: No, but they can be consortium members/partners. USGS centers cannot be formal members of consortia, either as host or partner.

Q: Can I talk to federal employees about the proposal?

Q: Can we coordinate/partner with US Federal agencies or centers for the center award? This was not clear based on the wording on the front page of the solicitation vs. what was stated on the phone call.

A: Yes. The Program Announcement has been revised regarding federal and USGS participation. USGS employees are prohibited from serving in any capacity (paid or unpaid) on any application submitted under this Announcement, and may not participate in the development of proposals. Federal employees from agencies that are included as consortium partners may assist in the development of proposals, but funding for federal agencies playing such a role will be provided via separate Interagency Agreement, not under the cooperative agreements resulting from this Program Announcement. This does not prohibit cooperation or collaboration between USGS and non-USGS scientists once a grant or cooperative agreement is in place.

Q: Can funding go to federal agencies?

A: Yes, but as noted above, Federal entities may not be Host Institutions. In cases where a Federal entity is a partner and the proposal includes funding for that Federal entity, USGS would provide the funds directly to the relevant agency interagency agreements, rather than being included in funding provided under the cooperative agreement with the Host Institution.

Q: What are the expectations for staff? How do they interact with the university?

A: Most Climate Science Centers have a director, and deputy director or research coordinator; some have research scientists or a communications expert, and some will have a BIA Climate Science Tribal Liaison. USGS believes close interaction between university-funded faculty, students and other staff is very beneficial to the overall functioning of a CSC. Co-located space for researchers, post-docs, and other CSC staff members is preferred.

Q: Are there federal facilities restrictions that could affect staff? Do CSCs have to have security similar to many federal buildings?

A: No special physical or electronic security is required for CSCs. Most of our facilities are located on university campuses and staff use the USGS electronic network for security purposes.

Q: Will all staff employees need to be US citizens?

A: All USGS employees need to be US citizens. This requirement does not extend to university-hired staff.

Q: Can we have collaborators outside of the United States (e.g. Canada)?

A: Yes.

Q: Why was the Northeast Climate Science Center region originally chosen and why was it split to create a proposed Midwest region?

A: The northeast (as defined by the original CSC region) is a large and ecologically diverse region that encompasses a significant portion of the U.S. population. Stakeholders in this region asked for the addition of the Midwest Climate Science Center to assist in the management of this expansive area. However, this decision was unrelated to the performance of the Northeast Climate Science Center which has done a great job managing priorities. The addition of the Midwest Climate Science Center will only go forward if additional funds are awarded to manage the needs in the new region.

Q: What was the reason for changing the name of the Great Lakes Climate Science Center to the Midwest Climate Science Center?

A: USGS already has a Great Lakes Science Center, so naming a center the Great Lakes Climate Science Center could cause conflict. Also, the new center would not be focused solely on the Great Lakes. Other parts of the Midwest region would be equally prioritized.

Q: Where can we find more information about the communications guidelines referenced in the Program Announcement?

A: A draft of the communications guidelines can be found [here](#).

Q: Clarify the process for distributing the additional follow-on research funds - the funding for science projects that are solicited after the center is in place. Does the center run the reviews for the science? Do they use a defined review process? Does the center then serve as the administrator of ALL sub awards for both the center consortium members and any (non-federal) institutions that are given follow-on awards, or is the follow-on award funding provided to the recipient from a DOI-administered award?

A: CSCs provide research funding to either the university partners or to USGS centers. (Across the network, the breakdown is roughly 50/50, but this is not determined a priori, but rather by competition or co-development).

All university funds are routed through the Host Institution, and technically, the University Director is the "PI". In many cases this is a nominal, on-paper role, although as the RFP notes we want the University Director to be cognizant at a strategic level of what all the research funding at the CSC is accomplishing. The Host may make sub awards to other partner institutions, and to other parties. In other words, there is no limitation on who may be funded under a research award, once it hits the Host Institution.

The USGS CSC Director makes the decision as to which projects / institutions are funded.

The mechanism varies from CSC to CSC and year to year, but is either a "limited RFP" (more below) or what we call "directed funding" -- projects developed by the USGS Director and a university PI.

"Limited RFPs" are run by the CSC (actually, via NCCWSC's proposal management system) and are open only to proposals submitted through the Host Institution. As noted above, once the Host puts their name on it, funding can go to anyone else. In practice, this usually means that university partner

institutions or the Host are the PIs, and if there are outside parties, they are usually second to either the Host PI or a university partner PI.

Q: Would reviewers see a disadvantage in naming a private institution (or a PI from one) as a consortium partner?

A: Not at all. While state universities and land grants have been the core of the university participation, that is not by (our) design. Private institutions are A-OK

Q: Is the fourth component of page 14 Letters of Support?

A: Yes.

Q: Is it correct that the 15-page limit applies only to the Technical Proposal Narrative, and letters of support would be included as an appendix and not included as part of that 15-page limitation?

A: Yes.

Format for Resume / Curriculum Vitae and Conflict of Interest Information:

Provide a biographical sketch, resume, or curriculum vitae for the University Director/Principal Investigator and for each member of the proposal leadership team including, as appropriate, at least one senior investigator from each consortium partner. Recommended information includes - Education and Training, Research and Professional Experience with special emphasis on activities at the science/management or science/policy interface, Publications and Synergistic Activities. The biographical sketch should be limited to two (2) pages each in length, **excluding publications listings**. The vitae should include a presentation of academic and research credentials, as applicable; e.g., earned degrees, teaching experience, employment history, professional activities, honors and awards, and grants received. A chronological list of **all** publications in **refereed journals** during the past **four (4) years**, including those in press, must be included. Also, list only those **non-refereed** technical publications that have **relevance** to the proposed project. All authors should be listed in the same order as they appear on each paper cited, along with the title and complete reference as these usually appear in journals. Collaborators and Affiliations for conflicts of interest are requested separately; see below.

Identification of Potential Conflicts of Interest or Bias in Selection of Reviewers: In order to enable USGS to avoid conflicts in its review process, provide a tabular list of collaborators for all senior/key personnel. This should include all persons who are, or who have been, collaborators or co-authors with leadership team members on a research project, book or book article, report, abstract, or paper during the 48 months preceding the submission of this proposal. For publications or collaborations with more than 10 authors or participants, only list those individuals in the core group with whom the leadership team member interacted on a regular basis while the research was being done. Also, list any individuals who are currently, or have been, co-editors with leadership team members on a special issue of a journal, compendium, or conference proceedings during the 24 months preceding the submission of this application. Also, list students or post-doctoral researcher whom the individual has supervised directly. If there are no collaborators or co-editors to report, state "None."

Provide a single alphabetized list for the entire leadership team.

Leadership team name	Collaborators: Last name, First name/initial	Institution

REVISED Scoring Factors and Weights

Proposed individuals, departments and institutions provide demonstrated expertise and experience to achieve the CSC mission of addressing climate change impacts to and adaptation of land, water, fish and wildlife, nearshore, coastal, and cultural heritage resources and the ecosystem services upon which human communities depend. <ul style="list-style-type: none">Proposed University Director [Principal Investigator] and Department or	0-15 points.
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<p>College has well-defined linkages to climate impacts research or climate change adaptation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed Host Institutions(s) adequately describe experience or capability to engage natural or cultural resource managers in climate impact research. 	
<p>Broad institutional support and awareness of CSC activities is encouraged among university participants.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Substantive and appropriate engagement and governance of other relevant departments and University administrators is included (see also “Governance and overall structure” below) 	0-10 points.
<p>Demonstrated understanding, experience and commitment to the co-development and implementation of applied climate science for the purpose of climate adaptation planning or resource management.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples are provided of engaging stakeholders before, during, and after the research process has been initiated. • Demonstrated understanding of collaborative research and knowledge co-production 	0-15 points.
<p>Adequate understanding of, commitment to, and resources for establishing a CSC as a cooperative partnership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear description of the role of a University Director / Principal Investigator and other consortium members (if applicable) • Adequate resources are provided to support the collaborative process and intellectual engagement among CSC staff • Proposal demonstrates understanding of and commitment to what is needed to make the CSC an exceptional research and training facility for applied climate impact research 	0-10 points.
<p>Education and capacity building is cogently described, managed effectively, and aligned adequately with CSC-identified priorities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly stated commitment that sponsored student research or training align with CSC priorities • Clearly stated intention of collaboration, as appropriate, with the CSC Director • Appropriate investment of resources in student or post-doc research or training. • Creative or innovative educational and capacity building approaches / activities are encouraged • Engagement with tribal or other indigenous students and early-career individuals are encouraged 	0-10 points.
<p>Demonstrated ability to effectively communicate and disseminate climate change science to a wide range of managers and decision-makers.</p>	0-10 points.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposal defines products and/or outlines a strategy for communicating CSC scientific findings • Demonstrated ability to effectively disseminate climate science for the purpose of informing or engaging managers • Proposals that clearly define broad, effective, or innovative use of technology to enhance communication are encouraged • Demonstrated ability and innovation in website design and content management. 	
Adequate support is given to providing essential or unmet administrative functions for the CSC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staffing levels, skills, and qualifications are well-defined and justified. • Dedicated staff positions for CSC administrative operations are encouraged. 	0-5 points.
Governance and overall structure for the regional CSC enterprise <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roles, functions, and expectations for host and consortium members (as appropriate) are clearly described. Mechanisms are proposed to ensure meaningful, cooperative engagement of all consortium members. • The amount of time and effort proposed for funded investigators, students, or post-docs is appropriate given stated needs • Proposed staffing at the host University justified and the desired experience, skills, and roles for proposed staff are adequately described • How will the host institution manage the CSC across various Departments, Colleges and other administrative units to assure University level engagement? 	0-10 points.
A process and mechanism for engagement with tribal and indigenous communities is described <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrated understanding of the needs of and potential roles for tribes and indigenous communities in CSC research that may be conducted • Proposed strategies, processes, or activities are described that would allow for rich engagement of tribal / indigenous entities in CSC activities. 	0-5 points.
Data management support is provided <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear description of support and demonstrated understanding of compliance with USGS and NCCWSC data policies. • Clearly stated intention of support for a data steward (if proposed) • Demonstrated understanding of role of NCCWSC in data management activities. 	0-10 points.
Overall Value Evaluation Technical Review Panel members will be asked to evaluate all proposals to host CSCs in a region to recommend the “best value to the Government”, given costs, proposed activities, and capabilities of the proposals. This evaluation may result in an award to of a proposal that does not receive the highest technical rating of all proposals evaluated.	

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